NATION

Mumbaikars struggle as only 4 buses ply amid stir

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BUSINESS

Tata group on the hunt for new Air India CEO

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SPORTS

Cunha, Vinicius score in Brazil's 3-0 win over Haiti

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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8 acquitted in 2006 Nimbalkar murder case

MUMBAI, 20 JUNE

A special court in Mumbai has acquitted former Maharashtra home minister Padamsinh Patil and seven others in the 2006 murder of Congress leader Pawanraje Nimbalkar and his driver, citing insufficient evidence. The judge criticised the CBI for failing to gather digital evidence and called the prosecution's case weak, especially noting contradictions in the prime witness's statements. The court described the incident as deeply tragic but said it could only judge within the law's framework. Patil, a former MP and stepbrother of Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar, was arrested in 2009 but granted bail. The CBI plans to appeal. —*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGE 4

Indian Railways doubles ticketless travel fine

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Indian Railways has increased penalties for passengers travelling without valid tickets under the Jan Vishwas Act, 2026, effective from June 20. The minimum fine under Sections 137 and 138 of the Railway Act, 1989, has doubled from Rs 250 to Rs 500. The Ministry of Railways stated: "The provisions of the said Act, in so far as it relates to the Railways Act, 1989, shall come into force." The Act stipulates that those travelling fraudulently or with used tickets must pay fare and excess charges, with penalties including fines or imprisonment. In May, Rs 40.85 crore was recovered from 4.96 lakh ticketless travellers. —*AGENCIES*

Fully prepared for NEET re-exam: NTA

Security tightened as India holds mock drills

An Indore police official stands guard, ahead of the NEET-UG re-examination, Madhya Pradesh, Saturday —*PTI*

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Saturday said it has put in place "comprehensive arrangements" to ensure "fair, secure and candidate-friendly" conduct of National Eligibility cum EntranceTest(Undergraduate) (NEET-UG) 2026 re-examination scheduled for Sunday.

The agency said it is closely monitoring social media and taking firm action against rumour-mongering, urging over 22 lakh aspirants and their parents to rely solely on official communication from the NTA. It added that the examination is being conducted across 5,440 centres in 551 cities in India and 14 centres abroad, in English and 12 Indian languages.

The re-test will be held in more than 95,000 examination rooms, each equipped with two invigilators and CCTV cameras, with feeds monitored virtually at the national, state and ministry levels. A centre systems officer (CSO) has been deployed at each centre to monitor and resolve technical issues.

A total of 6,700 observers have been deployed and more than 100 virtual observers will monitor the live CCTV footage centrally, which will be analysed using artificial intelligence-based tools to flag anomalies. Additionally, 51,311 electronic device jammers have also been deployed.

Candidate verification has been strengthened with 38,795 frisking staff and 48,448 personnel for biometric verification and face authentication, the agency said.

Around 40 to 50 security personnel have been deployed at each examination centre.

Bank officials have been deployed at approximately 1,500 bank branches holding the confidential material, while the Department of Posts will coordinate its teams for the collection of OMR sheets at around 700 collection centres across the country, the agency added.

Review meetings have been held with senior officials and chief secretaries of all states, and a nationwide mock drill was conducted on Saturday to verify all systems in place, including examination material. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3,4

MASSIVE EXERCISE

TOTAL CANDIDATES IN INDIA
22.79 LAKH

KARNATAKA
1.45 LAKH

TOTAL CENTRES IN INDIA
5,440

TIME OF EXAM
2 TO 5.15PM.
1 HOUR EXTENSION FOR CANDIDATES WITH SPL NEEDS

RE-TEST IN 561 CITIES IN INDIA, 14 CITIES ABROAD

PERSONNEL DEPLOYED
2 LAKH

PRECAUTIONS

- IAF choppers are carrying question papers
- Telegram banned
- Jammers are in place
- Internet blocked in places
- Gatherings barred

Iran shuts Hormuz over Israel's Lebanon strikes

DUBAI, 20 JUNE

Angered by Israel's continued attacks in Lebanon, Iran deal two quick blows to the interim agreement with the US on Saturday by closing the Strait of Hormuz again and announcing that while its negotiators were going to Switzerland for talks, not much is likely to happen there.

Key mediator Pakistan said that technical-level talks will begin on Sunday in Bürgenstock, Switzerland, with Qatari mediators also participating.

Iran said that the Strait had been closed due to the Israeli attacks and US "bad faith" and "clear breach of its commitments" by failing to end the war. In a statement on state television Iran's military command warned that "if the aggression continues, subsequent steps have been planned."

Shortly after that, the state broadcaster announced that Iran's negotiating team was heading to Switzerland "in the coming minutes," a trip that had been originally planned for Friday. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Bagahei, however, signalled that little might happen until Iran feels the US is living up to the deal.

"This trip is therefore about demanding that the other side fulfil its obligations," he said, adding that negotiations toward a final agreement will begin only once key commitments are upheld. If they are not, he said, "then the memorandum of understanding as a whole will be jeopardised."

The closure of the Straits is likely to further increase the energy crisis that has

In Washington, Vice President JD Vance confirmed on Saturday that the top US negotiators — Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff — were already in Switzerland and have been working through technical details of the anticipated negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme.

"We have a lot of economic pressure applied to the Iranians that we would be willing to relieve if they do what we need them to do. If they don't do that, of course, there's no skin off our back. They're still in a much weakened position," Vance said on Fox News.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Moshin Naqvi, meanwhile, visited Iran, over Tehran's nuclear programme. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz had increased after the 'Islamabad Memorandum' was signed this week, but its closure again is likely to spell disaster for the world's energy market —*PRESS TV*

KARNATAKA PROTESTS SIR

As the six-month Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls began in Karnataka on Saturday, aiming to cover some 5.5 crore voters, volunteers from Karnataka SIR Virodhi Forum protested in Bengaluru's Freedom Park, demanding that the notorious 'logical discrepancy' category be dropped from the process. Booth Level Officers will start door to door visits from 30 June —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

5 dead, 18 hurt as M'rashtra temple roof falls

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 20 JUNE

People gather after the under-construction roof of a Hanuman temple collapsed at Yashwadi village in Parbhani district, Maharashtra, on Saturday —*X @SUNETRAA_PAWAR*

At least five persons died and 18 were injured after the under-construction roof of a Hanuman temple collapsed at Yashwadi village in Maharashtra's Parbhani district on Saturday afternoon, police said. The village is located on the Parbhani-Manwat road, about 190km from Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar.

A part of the roof of the under-construction 'sabha-mandap' or outer hall collapsed around 3.30pm, said a police official. While five persons were confirmed dead, around 25 people have been rescued so far, he said.

It being a Saturday, a day associated with Lord Hanuman, the temple saw a rush of devotees, another official said. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis expressed grief over the deaths of devotees, and said the injured were being provided medical treatment.

The kin of the deceased will receive financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh each, he announced. The deceased were identified as Santosh Gadade resident of Mantha, Akash Surduse from Parbhani, Munesh Agarwal 26, from Jintur, Suraj Popatkar, 20, Manwat, and Srikrushna Gaware, 38, from Wadvani-Beed. —*PTI*

Karnataka to get 'Prajaseva Dept' for redressing public grievances

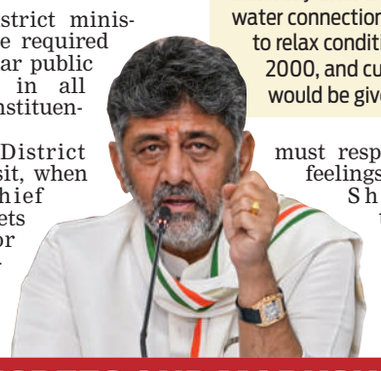
BENGALURU, 20 JUNE

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that a new department named 'Prajaseva Department' (Public service department) would be established and headed by a Minister to streamline the redressal of public grievances.

He said district ministers would be required to hold regular public interactions in all Assembly constituencies.

"When District Ministers visit, when the Chief Minister meets people, or when protests are held, we must respond to their feelings and issues," Shivakumar told reporters after a Cabinet meeting. sHe said an IAS officer would head a grievance-monitoring mechanism and applications submitted to Ministers, including those received directly by the CM, would be routed through the department. — *PTI*

>>>More on Page 2



15-DAY WINDOW TO GET PERMANENT POWER CONNECTIONS

The government has decided to provide a 15-day window for eligible people staying in buildings completed before 31 May 2000, to apply for permanent electricity connections by furnishing photographic and GPS evidence, Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Saturday after a cabinet meeting. On permanent electricity and water connections, Shivakumar said the government has decided to relax conditions. He said buildings completed before 31 May 2000, and currently having temporary electricity connections would be given an opportunity to apply.

Centre bans 16 fixed-dose drug combos

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

The Centre has prohibited the manufacture, sale and distribution of 16 fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs, saying they lack "therapeutic justification" and their continued use was not considered beneficial in relation to the potential risks involved. FDC drugs are those which contain a combination of two or more active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) in a fixed ratio.

Among the banned formulations are combinations such as Acetyl Salicylic Acid with Ethoheptazine; Dicyclomine, Paracetamol and Clidinium Bromide; Dicyclomine, Paracetamol, Clidinium Bromide and Chlordiazepoxide; Gliclazide with Chromium Picolinate; and Paracetamol with Lignocaine.

Several antibiotic-based combinations have also been prohibited, including Amoxicillin with Serratiopeptidase, Amoxicillin with Serratiopeptidase and Lactobacillus Sporogenes, Amoxicillin with Cloxacillin, Lactic Acid Bacillus and Serratiopeptidase, Cefadroxyl with Probenecid, and Cefuroxime with Serratiopeptidase.

The banned list additionally includes several dermatological and skincare formulations containing combinations of Aloe Vera or Aloe Extract with ingredients such as Vitamin E, Jojoba Oil, Orange Oil, Wheat Germ Oil, Tea Tree Oil, Allantoin and D-Panthenol.

The move, the Union Health Ministry said, was to safeguard public health and promote rational use of medicines. The decision follows a review of FDCs undertaken in compliance with the Supreme Court's directions. —*PTI*

IN DEGREES AND MARKSHEETS

Chhattisgarh varsity cancels 'India' for 'Bharat'

BILASPUR, 20 JUNE

A central university in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur has decided to replace the word "India" with "Bharat" in its marksheets, degree certificates and official communications, its top official said on Saturday.

Guru Ghasidas Central University took the decision, and its standing committee passed a resolution to this effect about six months ago, the university's Vice Chancellor Alok Kumar Chakrawal said. "Gradually, the word 'Bharat' will replace 'India' in marksheets, degrees and official communications".

At present, university marksheets and degree certificates carry references to both India and Bharat in English and Hindi respectively. Under the new decision, "India" appearing in English will also be replaced with "Bharat".

Chakrawal added that the change will be implemented once the existing stock of marksheets and degree certificates is exhausted.

Explaining the rationale behind the move, the VC referred to the use of the term "Bharat" during the G20 Summit hosted by India in 2023. "The name India was given by foreigners for their convenience. We need not be guided by what outsiders thought".

Officials of some state universities said no such decision had been taken by their institutions yet. —*PTI*

AIFF wants to be called 'Football Federation of Bharat'

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Saturday decided to approach the sports ministry to change its name to Football Federation of Bharat (FFB) after a proposal to that effect was accepted during the Special General Body Meeting here. —*PTI*

—ANI

Former JD(S) MLA Lingesh arrested in land scam

HASSAN, 20 JUNE

Senior JD(S) leader and ex-MLA KS Lingesh was arrested in connection with a 2023 land allotment scam under the Bagair Hukum scheme, police said on Saturday. Lingesh was detained on Friday alongside former revenue inspectors, tehsildars, and village accountants. The case follows a 2023 complaint by a Kolar-based social activist, alleging illegal land allotments during Lingesh's tenure as president of the Belur Taluk Bagair Hukum Committee. The police registered a case, later transferred to the CID in 2024.

The complaint claims around 2,750 acres were allotted to 1,430 bogus beneficiaries using fake documents. Lingesh's plea to quash the case was rejected, and the investigation continued.—*PTI*

Two men killed in hit-and-run near Chikkaballapura

CHIKKABALLAPURA, 20 JUNE

Two young men were killed instantly when their motorcycle was allegedly struck from behind by an unidentified vehicle near Honnehalli Gate on the outskirts of Chikkaballapura, along the Bengaluru-Hyderabad National Highway late on Friday night. The accident occurred between 10.30pm. and 11pm. The deceased are Varun, 21, from Badiganahalli village, and Jeevan, 20, from Kunigal. Both worked at Srinivasa Logistics near Chikkaballapura. Sources said they were returning home when the incident happened. The incident has cast a pall of gloom over their families, with Varun recently losing his father. This is the fourth fatal accident on the stretch within 20 days, raising safety concerns.—*SALAR NEWS*

HC quashes case against DKS, KPCC media wing head

BENGALURU, 20 JUNE

The High Court quashed the criminal case against Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and KPCC Social Media Head BR Naidu over a Congress social media post that criticised BJP leaders during the 2022 Hubballi riot protests. The FIR, registered at High Grounds Police Station under IPC Sections 153A, 504, 505(2) and 464, stemmed from a private complaint by BJP legal cell leader Yogendra. The court accepted the petition seeking quashing of the proceedings, bringing the case against both the accused to an end. Riots broke out near the old Hubballi PS after news about social media photos of a saffron flag flying atop a mosque spread.—*SALAR NEWS*

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New K'taka Bhavan to come up in Delhi

The new Rs 80 cr building is only for civil service aspirants; SC/STs get 50% quota

BENGALURU, 20 JUNE

The Karnataka Cabinet on Saturday approved a series of measures covering education, healthcare, infrastructure and administrative reforms, including the construction of Karnataka Bhavan-4 in New Delhi for civil services aspirants and a 200-bed super-speciality hospital in Yadgir.

Addressing reporters after the second Cabinet meeting of his government, Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said Karnataka Bhavan-4 would be built by the Public Works Department at an estimated cost of Rs 80 crore.

"This facility is not meant for legislators or officials. It is intended for students preparing for IAS, IFS, IRS and other competitive examinations," Shivakumar said, adding that at least 50 per cent of the accommodation would be reserved for SC/ST students.

The existing Karnataka Bhavan is used to administrative purposes, officials said.

Shivakumar also announced a reorganisation of the Resident Commissioner's Office in New Delhi, saying the State government would establish a dedicated mechanism to monitor Central government projects and schemes and improve Karnataka's engagement with the Union government.

He said this would also "benefits being secured by states such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat".

Shivakumar said the government was also exploring the possibility of engaging retired IAS, IRS and IPS officers in Delhi and would establish a dedicated legal cell in the national capital to handle Supreme Court cases and other important litigation involving Karnataka.

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar interacts with 'non resident Kannadigas' from 30 countries at Vidhana Soudha, on Saturday —*X@DKSHIVAKUMAR*

HEALTHCARE

The Cabinet approved major expansion of medical facilities in the state.

"We have decided to construct a 200-bed super-speciality hospital within the campus of the Yadgir Institute of Medical Sciences. Administrative approval of Rs 100 crore has been granted," he said.

The Cabinet also approved six civil works at the Karwar Institute of Medical Sciences at a cost of about Rs 18 crore and granted administrative approval for Rs 60 crore worth of equipment procurement and upgrades at the Government Medical College and Research Hospital in Bengaluru.

The Cabinet also approved an Urban Development proposal in Kalasapura village of Gadag district under a 50:50 sharing model, with the project expected to cost about Rs 19-20 crore. Shivakumar said a Cabinet sub-committee meeting had been scheduled for Monday over remaining issues. —*PTI*

GOVT MULLS TRANSPORT FARE REVISION AMID RISING FUEL PRISES

BENGALURU, 20 JUNE

Speaking after a Cabinet meeting, Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said that the government was examining a possible fare revision in view of rising fuel costs and operational concerns.

"At present, there is a huge difference between the price at which private operators buy diesel and the price available at our depots. The difference is more than Rs 40 per litre. This is an alarming figure," he said.

He said the Transport Department had submitted a proposal and a report had been sought on the matter, adding that any decision would balance the financial sustainability of KSRTC with the interests of passengers.

Shivakumar also said the government had cleared the purchase of new buses for

State-run transport corporations.

"We have approved the purchase of 620 new buses at a cost of Rs 235 crore. Of these, 400 BS-VI buses will be for KSRTC and 220 buses for the North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation," he said.

He added that the Cabinet had approved Rs 112 crore for the establishment of 11 electric bus depots under KSRTC, NWKRTC and KKRTC as part of a Government of India-supported initiative. —*PTI*

Where should industries go: DKS asks ahead of JD(S) Bidadi padayatra

BENGALURU, 20 JUNE

A day ahead of the JD(S)' proposed padayatra against the Bidadi township, Chief Minister DK Shivakumar accused Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy and the BJP of politicising the issue. Shivakumar called Kumaraswamy the "architect" of the initiative, noting that the project was notified during the latter's tenure as chief minister.

On Sunday, JD(S) leaders, led by Nikhil Kumaraswamy will begin a padayatra from Anjipur at 9.00am and visit affected villages, including Anjipur Colony, Bannigiri, Marevegoudanadoddi, Gundutoopu, Gollahalli, Kodipalya and conclude at Hosur.

The Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township is seen among Shivakumar's ambition projects, presented as India's first AI-powered integrated township. It is expected to cover about 7,481 acres across nine villages in the region, according to official sources. However, farmers have been protesting against the mass land acquisition for over 450 days, and are now receiving the support of the Opposition parties.

"Kumaraswamy issued the notification. BS Yediyurappa continued the project. We are only taking it forward. We're not doing anything new," Shivakumar said. "Kumaraswamy himself had said that farmers would be given 40 per cent of the developed land as compensation. We have said that we will give 50 per cent of the developed land. The process of providing compensation of Rs 2.50 crore per acre to farmers began on Friday".

Kumaraswamy, however, said he would release "files" on the statements Shivakumar made about the project earlier, and added that he dropped the proposal in the Assembly amid opposition from farmers then. He warned of a "bloody revolution".

Shivakumar hit back: "He is the Union Minister for Heavy Industries. He wants industries to come. He himself must answer where, how and on whose land the industries should be set up." —*Salar News*

Don't want extra water from TN: Minister

BENGALURU, 20 JUNE

Water Resources Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Saturday said Karnataka was seeking only its allocated share of Cauvery water and not "even a single drop" more from Tamil Nadu, reiterating that the proposed Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir would benefit both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu farmers.

"We only want the water that has been allocated to us," Reddy told press in Bengaluru. His comments come after the Tamil Nadu Assembly passed a unanimous resolution against the dam.

He said Tamil Nadu had opposed the project despite its potential benefits.

"If the Mekedatu dam had already been built, and if there had been water stored there, we could have released water to Tamil Nadu even now despite the lack of rainfall. That would have helped us meet drinking water requirements as well," he claimed. "By opposing the project, they are actually causing difficulties for their own farmers."

"It is simply a storage dam. It will provide Bengaluru with 4.75 TMC of drinking water. It will not provide any water for irrigation. It will also generate around 400 MW of electricity," he added. "Would it not be better if neighbouring states resolved these issues amicably?"

The Tamil Nadu Assembly passed a resolution against the Mekedatu dam, arguing it will impact lakhs of farmers on the Cauvery Delta —*WIKIPEDIA*

> **It would be better if the matter is resolved through discussions. What happens if everything goes to court? It drags on for years. Look at the Krishna water dispute. The final notification has not been issued even after 13-14 years. Three states have gone to court. At this pace, it may take until 2050 to conclude**
>
> -Ramalinga Reddy, Water Resources Minister

'DPR IS READY'

He said that the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for Mekedatu was ready. "We have submitted it to the Cauvery Water Regulation Commission. They suggested some modifications, which we are making. Once they approve, we will proceed."

WATER RUNNING OUT

On the present water situation, Reddy said Karnataka's reservoirs have limited water. There is only 16 TMC of water available in the two Cauvery-linked reservoirs -11 TMC in the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) reservoir and about 5 TMC in Kabini. "Up to 18 June, 2026, we have released two TMC of water. After accounting for drinking water requirements and maintaining some flow in the river, only around three TMC is available".

TUNGABHADRA & KRISHNA

Reddy said Union Water Resource Minister CR Patil is scheduled to visit the Tungabhadra Dam on 25 June for a programme marking the replacement of all 33 dam gates. He said the gates were replaced after one of the old gates had collapsed.

He said Karnataka may utilise the occasion to hold discussions with leaders of neighbouring states on pending river water issues.

"Tamil Nadu CM may not attend the event. However, Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu and Telangana CM Revanth Reddy are expected to be present at the event. If we get an opportunity, we will talk about the Krishna River water issue. Otherwise, there may be another meeting in Delhi," he said. —*PTI*

Man assaulted over interfaith friendship in Hubballi

HUBBALLI, 20 JUNE

A man was allegedly assaulted by a group of 8-10 individuals claiming to be members of a Hindu organisation on Friday on the outskirts of Hubballi. It appears to be a case of moral policing over the man's visit to a hotel with a woman from another community.

The victim, Sharaveen Jogul, a resident of Basel Mission Compound, had been in a relationship with a woman belonging to another community.

On Friday, the couple visited Rasta-63 Hotel near Anchatagere for a meal, where the group confronted them. The gang took Sharaveen away from the hotel and confined him in a shed near Siddharoodha Math, where he was assaulted.

They also threatened to kill him and demanded Rs 5 lakh from his mom.

Sharaveen is undergoing treatment at KMCRI Hospital. A case has been registered at the Hubballi Rural PS. —*Salar News*

PALACE GROUNDS GEARS UP

People prepare food a day before BK Hariprasad's swearing in ceremony as the KPCC President at the Palace Grounds in Bengaluru on Saturday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Cops stop MES men headed to meet Amit Shah in Kolhapur

BELAGAVI, 20 JUNE

State Police halted Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) leaders and supporters at the Hattargi toll plaza while they were travelling to Kolhapur to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah over the Karnataka-Maharashtra border dispute. The MES delegation had left Belagavi in multiple vehicles to submit a memorandum and raise issues related to the long-standing border conflict during Shah's visit.

Police intercepted the convoy following security instructions reportedly issued by the Kolhapur district administration. MES leaders questioned the legality of the action and demanded a written order to justify the restriction, which police refused to produce. The protesters staged a sit-in, causing traffic disruptions and tension in the area.

MES protesters staged a sit-in in Belagavi, leading to traffic disruptions and tension in the area on Saturday—*SCREENGRAB*

The incident occurred amid the historic territorial dispute, dating back to the 1956 State Reorganisation Act, with Maharashtra claiming Belagavi and Marathi-speaking areas, while Karnataka references the 1966 Mahajan Commission report.

Security was heightened after the protest, and legal proceedings regarding the border remain pending before the courts. —*Salar News*

SLAMS HOSPITAL CONDITIONS

BRIMS lab techie held with lakhs in cash, ATM cards

BIDAR, 20 JUNE

During a surprise inspection at Bidar Institute of Medical Sciences (BRIMS), Karnataka Upa Lokayukta Justice B Veerappa recovered Rs 1 lakh in cash, a cheque for the same amount, and several ATM cards from laboratory technician Sanjukumar Buyya's bag on Saturday afternoon. When questioned, Sanjukumar reportedly fumbled and failed to give a satisfactory explanation, prompting Justice Veerappa to reprimand BRIMS Superintendent Dr Shivayogi Bali.

He stated, "The discovery of such a large amount of money in a public institution like a hospital raises serious suspicions," and directed officials to investigate, seize the cash and cheque, and register a suo motu case.

Upa Lokayukta Justice B Veerappa recovered Rs 1 lakh in cash, a cheque for the same amount, and several ATM cards from a lab technician during a suprise visit to the government run BRIMS on Saturday—*Salar*

> **Even prisons would not have such conditions. Doctor, would you sleep on such a bed? What are you doing with crores of rupees? How can a six-storey building function without adequate beds and water?**
>
> -Justice Veerappa, Upa Lokayukta

The Upa Lokayukta also expressed displeasure at the torn and damaged beds in patient wards, criticising the poor condition of facilities. During inspections across Bidar, Justice Veerappa was particularly upset by the hospital's inadequate beds and water supply, questioning, "What are you doing with crores of rupees? How can a six-storey building function without adequate beds and water? There is not even seating for patients' attendants."

He criticised BRIMS Director Shantala Kaujalagi and District Surgeon MS Bali, emphasising the need for regular inspections.

At Bidar Medical College Hospital, the technician's possession of Rs 1 lakh and a cheque was questioned; officials were instructed to seize the money and investigate.

SLAMS BIDAR BUS STAND

The team also visited Bidar's Central Bus Stand, criticising unhygienic conditions and mismanagement, and directed the authorities to improve cleanliness and hygiene standards in the interests of public health. —*Salar News*

WANTED GROOM

Looking for a groom between 26 to 30 years of age for a 25 year old fair, slim, hijabi girl working from home as a software engineer hailing from a highly respectable, well-settled and educated family in Bangalore. Boys in Bangalore, UK/Europe or Gulf are preferred Send profiles and photos to.

saarat17@gmail.com

'Hate speech normalised in BJP's Viksit Bharat'

SRINAGAR, 20 JUNE

PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti condemned the silence around hate speech, claiming it emboldens divisive forces. She stated, "This is what the BJP's so-called Viksit Bharat looks like, hate speech normalised to the extent that even unborn Muslim children are threatened." Mufti criticised the demolition of homes and mosques, highlighting marginalisation of Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and Adivasis. She referred to alleged hate speech by Lalit Sharma, president of Hindu Raksha Dal, targeting Muslim women and unborn babies. Mufti's post on X said, "Ongoing silence in the face of such rhetoric only emboldens those who seek to divide our society." She voiced concern over rising intolerance and societal division. —*PTI*

— PTI

Director, ex-AIADMK minister joins TVK

CHENNAI, 20 JUNE

Several political figures, including film director RV Udayakumar and former AIADMK minister Gomathi Srinivasan, joined the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) on Saturday. Udayakumar, who resigned from AIADMK on 16 June after 25 years, was renowned for directing box-office hits such as Chinna Gounder and Yajaman. He headed the party's arts wing. Gomathi Srinivasan, a former AIADMK minister, was also among those joining. Others included MGM Subramanian, Jagannath Misra, IC Sekar, and AN Raja. The party's senior leaders, including 'Bussy' N Anand and Aadhav Arjuna, welcomed the new members, signalling a strategic shift in Tamil Nadu politics. —*PTI*

Tej Pratap claims conspiracy to kill him & father

PATNA, 20 JUNE

Tej Pratap Yadav, head of Janshakti Janta Dal, filed a police complaint alleging a conspiracy to murder him and his father, Lalu Prasad. The complaint, lodged at Sachivalaya police station, named Akash Yadav and six others, claiming efforts to tarnish his reputation. Tej Pratap said, "My father is unwell... They are hatching a conspiracy to kill me and my father." He also claimed that Akash Yadav, with whom he had a relationship, might be involved in collusion with opposition forces. Yadav requested police security and suggested the threat could be politically motivated. Meanwhile, Akash Yadav filed a counter-complaint, alleging Tej Pratap and aide attempted to force entry into his home. —*PTI*

— ANI

Men shoot at Haryana Cong MLA Rohtak office

CHANDIGARH, 20 JUNE

Unidentified shooters fired at the office of Congress MLA Balram Dangi in Rohtak's Meham early Saturday. The incident occurred around 1am, with four rounds fired, damaging the doors and windows. Dangi received a call from his caretaker about the damage, and upon inspecting photographs, confirmed firing occured. He informed police, who found four spent cartridges and recovered CCTV. Dangi said, "I got a call from my office caretaker that the glass damaged." Multiple teamsare are working to identify and apprehend the assailants. No injuries were reported. —*PTI*

Won't leave Jantar Matar until Pradhan quits: CJP

DELHI POLICE DENY PERMISSION FOR PROTEST

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Delhi Police has denied permission to Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) to continue its protest at Jantar Mantar, even as party founder Abhijeet Dipke asserting that he will not move from the site until the Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigns.

Police have asked CJP supporters to vacate the site where a large number of students and others have been demonstrating over alleged examination irregularities, repeated paper leaks and demands for accountability from the government.

Earlier, Dipke had appealed to supporters to join the ongoing protest at Jantar Mantar at 6 pm, expressing confidence that police will grant the permission for the extension.

The youth leader also said that the channel for dialogue is open, but the "only condition is that Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan should resign."

He also requested Delhi Police to "open a dialogue with the Centre" and asserted, "If there are arrests, I will be the first to court arrest."

The protest started earlier in the day amid heavy police deployment as students sloganeered and held placards seeking answers from the government over alleged failures in ensuring transparent examinations and protecting the interests of aspirants. Chants of "Dharmendra Pradhan must resign" echoed at the venue.

Dipke arrived at the protest venue to huge cheers from the crowd and said they want to resolve the issues faced by the students. Ahead of the protest, he had written an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding that accountability be fixed over the concerns raised by students.

Many participants at the protest admitted uncertainty about the future direction of the movement. Yet, they said, they felt compelled to join because some form of collective mobilisation had become necessary. —*PTI*

Hundreds of 'cockroaches' gathered at the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) protest near New Delhi's Jantar Mantar to demand the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke is seen in the middle (black t-shirt) with protesters demanding for accountability for repeated exam paper leaks —*PTI*

Uddhav flays rebels' claims on Cong & Sena (UBT) merger

MUMBAI, 20 JUNE

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray rejected claims attributed to six rebel MPs that they feared the party might merge with the Congress, asserting that the united Sena always supported Hindutva. He claimed the country was moving towards the "one party, no election" path, a grave threat to democracy.

It was his first comments on the impending split in his party for the second time in four years.

"It (Shiv Sena) was created to fight for the rights of Marathi people and protect Hindutva," he said as a gathering of Shiv Sena (UBT) workers here, marking the 60th foundation day of the united Shiv Sena, founded by his father, late Bal Thackeray.

"If we didn't merge with the BJP despite being an ally for 30 years, how can we merge with the Congress. I fear the Maharashtra BJP might merge with the Shinde Sena," he said.

He said despite severe political differences with the Congress, but it never tried to destroy the Shiv Sena like the BJP is doing. He said due to BJP's "politics of engineering defections", people's faith in the democratic process was eroding.

Defying a whip, six of the nine Lok Sabha MPs of the Shiv Sena (UBT) on Thursday skipped a crucial parliamentary party meeting in New Delhi. They are Nagesh Aashtikar, Sanjay Jadhav, Sanjay Deshmukh, Sanjay Dina Patil, Omprakash Rajenimbalkar and Bhausaheb Wakchaure.

The former CM offered apologies to voters for electing these MPs, who now appear set to switch sides. —*PTI*

> **There is only one Shiv Sena, which is headed by Eknath Shinde**
>
> -Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

TN govt cancels Rs 246 cr projects announced by DMK

CHENNAI, 20 JUNE

The ruling TVK government has cancelled Rs 246 crore worth of projects envisaged using temple funds by the previous DMK regime.

The move would also prevent the temples under the control of Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department from going bankrupt.

The revenue generated by major ancient temples was used to fund government welfare schemes such as conducting marriages for the underprivileged, constructing marriage halls and massive shopping complexes, while the temples have been struggling to get back the land or shops leased out, a source said.

Hindu organisations such as the Hindu Munnani have been protesting against the use of temple funds for commercial purposes and government welfare schemes.

After the TVK-led government assumed office, the HR & CE department on 19 June cancelled the administrative approval accorded by the previous DMK regime to construct 29 marriage halls and 17 commercial complexes totalling Rs 246 crore. An official said that the funds will be for the temples and devotees.

Measures will be made to audit all temple properties, and endowment revenues for transparent digital accounts.

"Administrative malpractices that prevailed in earlier times will be eliminated, and this government will ensure that all movable and immovable assets of the temples are used solely for their sacred purposes," he had said. —*PTI*

Jahangir's wife held for attacking cops

KOLKATA, 20 JUNE

The wife of Trinamool Congress (TMC) repoll candidate Jahangir Khan was arrested on Saturday for allegedly masterminding a violent attempt to free him from police custody and leading an attack on the Falta police station earlier this month, officials said. Khan was arrested in multiple criminal cases after being tracked down near the Nepal border.

Regina Bibi, who had been absconding since the incident, was arrested from South 24 Parganas district following a tip-off, they said.

"Several serious charges, including provisions of the Arms Act and Explosives Act, have been invoked against her," a senior police officer said.

Investigators alleged that plans were drawn up at a meeting led by her to assemble supporters before marching towards the police station.

The situation turned violent when protesters allegedly vandalised police vehicles and attempted to storm the police station premises. Central forces were later deployed to disperse the crowd.

Several participants fled after security personnel launched a baton charge, with some allegedly jumping into a nearby pond to evade arrest, police sources said.

So far, 25 people have been arrested in connection with the incident.

The arrest of Regina Bibi comes amid the BJP government's ongoing crackdown on alleged criminal networks and political strongmen in parts of the state following its victory in the May assembly elections. During a public outreach programme in Falta on Wednesday, Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari had warned that the government would not tolerate "hooliganism or militancy." —*PTI*

TMC claims threat to Abhishek post chaos at airport

Chaos erupted at Kolkata Airport ahead of the arrival of Trinamool Congress (TMC) National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee from Delhi, with the party alleging a security threat and accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of orchestrating an attack.

In a post on X on Friday, the TMC alleged that an armed BJP worker had planned to target Banerjee and termed the incident a serious law-and-order failure. "If this is not a state-sponsored attempt to eliminate a political opponent, then what is?" it added. A supporter of Abhishek claimed that a confrontation broke out after BJP supporters arrived at the airport ahead of the TMC leader's arrival and that one of the former was carrying arms. —*ANI*

3 TMC bank accounts with Rs 440 cr frozen

The debit operations of three bank accounts of the Trinamool Congress holding around Rs 440 crore have been frozen following complaints by 10 rebel party Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) seeking a probe into the source of the funds. The MLAs questioned the source of funds deposited in the accounts, including suspected cut-money collections, diversion of public funds and proceeds of scams, and sought an inquiry into the transactions. The development comes amid an intensifying power struggle within the TMC between camps led by former minister Aroop Biswas and Leader of Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee following its defeat in the recent assembly polls.

Vijayan alleges UDF delaying women's pensions

T-PURAM, 15 JUNE

Leader of Opposition Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday accused the UDF government of "deliberately delaying" the Women's Security Pension scheme, alleging that more than 16 lakh beneficiaries have been denied payments for April and May due to a the state government.

Vijayan claimed that the pension files were being kept pending in the finance department, under Chief Minister VD Satheesan, and urged the government to reverse its stand. The Women's Security Scheme was launched by the previous LDF government to provide financial assistance to women from poor families, including transgender women, who were not covered under any existing social welfare programme.

Alleging that the UDF had ridiculed the scheme from the outset, Vijayan claimed that the government was now attempting to dismantle it by withholding pension payments and delaying decisions on fresh applications.

Vijayan said that 31.34 lakh women had been identified as beneficiaries and Rs 3,720 crore had been earmarked for the scheme in the LDF government's last budget. Pensions had been disbursed until March this year, he added. —*PTI*

'East India was backward under Cong, now dvpt hub'

RAIRANGPUR, 20 JUNE

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** on Saturday said eastern India, which remained backward during the Congress rule, was now emerging as a gateway to progress and development.

Addressing a public meeting at Rairangpur in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district after unveiling projects worth over Rs 47,600 crore, Modi said the state was rapidly moving ahead on the path of development.

"Eastern India, which remained backward during the Congress rule, is now emerging as a gateway to progress and development," he said.

Modi said the Centre's vision was to develop the country through the progress of eastern India, and that the government was working on the policy of 'Purvodaya'.

After a visit to President Droupadi Murmu's in-laws' village of Pahadpur in Mayurbhanj district earlier in the day on her 68th birthday, Modi announced it will be developed as a 'solar village', ensuring solar power generation in every household.

> • "Eastern India, which remained backward during Congress rule, is now emerging as a gateway to development," Modi said.

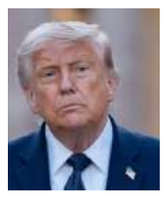
He lauded the state government's decision to give Rs 3,100 per quintal of paddy to farmers and financial assistance to over 1 crore women under Subhadra Yojana.

Stating, tribal areas had historically remained deprived of basic services and infrastructure, Modi said tribal development was a top priority of his government. —*PTI*

Modi tough cookie, great leader: Trump

WASHINGTON, 20 JUNE

US President **Donald Trump** lavished praise on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he is a "great leader" and "tough guy", in power for over 12 years.



In an interview with Axios, Trump referred to China's President Xi Jinping and Modi as the two greatest leaders he likes the most in terms of power and leverage, and the ability to execute on that.

"I think Modi is very good. Yeah. They've had some very good numbers announced. He stays out of wars, which is smart. He's 1.5 billion people. He's actually the biggest. India's actually the biggest. And Modi's a great leader," Trump said.

Trump said the US does a lot of business with India, which used to "rip us off".

"Now we do fair business," he said. "They used to do a lot better. Modi's great," Trump said.

The US president then listed Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir and PM Shehbaz Sharif as leaders he liked. —*PTI*

RaGa losing party support: BJP as Tharoor lauds PM

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

The BJP claimed that Rahul Gandhi is losing support within the Congress party, citing Congress MP Shashi Tharoor's recent comments praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi. BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla alleged Tharoor's remarks on Modi's handling of the seafarers issue before US President Donald Trump contradicted Gandhi's stance.

Poonawalla said, "It is embarrassing. Yesterday was Rahul Gandhi's birthday, but he did not receive any gift. Dr Tharoor contradicted Rahul Gandhi's stand, stating Modi articulated India's position forcefully before President Trump and conveyed the country's stance effectively."

"Tharoor has been effusively praised Modi's vision, articulation, dynamism, and oratory. He has said Modi has left a stamp on the lives of Indians." Poonawalla also criticised the Congress' projection of Gandhi as a future prime ministerial candidate, asserting that some party members do not share this view. "Rahul Gandhi has lost public support and backing of close associates like Ramachandra Guha and Tharoor," he said. —*PTI*

DEEPENING CRACKS?

Akhilesh may quit as SP chief, party will split: UP minister

BALLIA, 20 JUNE

Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) chief and Uttar Pradesh Panchayati Raj Minister Om Prakash Rajbhar on Saturday intensified his attack on the Samajwadi Party (SP), claiming that party president Akhilesh Yadav may step aside and Shivpal Singh Yadav would take over the party reins.

Addressing reporters in Ballia district's Bairia, he also reiterated that the SP was headed for a split, like Shiv Sena and the Trinamool Congress.

A section of SP leaders was in touch with the BJP, he said, adding that the process would begin from Ballia, which he described as a "land of rebels".

Without offering evidence, he claimed that SP MP Rajeev Rai had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and alleged that he would lead a rebellion within the SP at Shah's behest.

Rajbhar claimed that some SP MPs were preparing to align themselves with the ruling side as they saw little political future in the opposition party.

"In the coming days, Akhilesh Yadav will have to step aside to save the party, and Shivpal Singh Yadav will lead it," Rajbhar said.

Recently, Rajbhar urged Akhilesh to launch a campaign to "save his MPs", while the SP chief dismissed him as a "rumour-mongering minister". The polls to the 403-member state assembly are due in 2027. —*PTI*

India all set for NEET under tight security

Candidates wearing religious attire must report early for frisking

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Ahead of the NEET-UG 2026 re-examination, scheduled on Sunday, administrative and security preparations have been intensified nationwide to ensure the fair conduct of the medical entrance examination.

In the national capital, inspection rounds are underway to finalise arrangements at various centres.

An observer visiting the Government Boys Senior Secondary (GBSS) school in Ashok Vihar, Delhi, expressed sa2tisfaction with the facilities.

"Everything has been checked and found fit. Five schools have been designated as centres here. This is the first centre, and we now have to visit the others," the observer told ANI.

Meanwhile, in Uttar Pradesh, the District Magistrate of Prayagraj, Manish Kumar Verma, detailed the extensive arrangements made in the district.

"The NEET exam is scheduled to be held at 47 centres in Prayagraj district, and approximately 23,000 students will attend. Adequate police have been deployed," he said.

The NTA has advised candidates to reach their examination centres between 11am and 1.30pm. Gates will close at 1.30pm. The examination will be conducted in pen-and-paper mode from 2pm to 5.15pm across 551 cities in India and 14 cities abroad. Around 22.79 lakh candidates are expected to appear for the test on 21 June. Candidates will be allowed to carry a transparent water bottle, while diabetic candidates may bring sugar tablets and fruits such as bananas, apples and oranges along with a transparent water bottle, in accordance with NTA guidelines, it said.

The NTA said extra biometric machines have been deployed to expedite verification. Travel and weather advisories have alos been issued. Candidates have to verify test centre addresses from their admit cards. The agency advised candidates wearing customary or religious attire, as well as those wearing full-sleeved clothing to report early for checks. — *Agencies*

Police and security personnel make arrangements ahead of the NEET-UG re-examination at a centre in Chikkamagaluru in Karnataka on Saturday. Around 22.79 lakh candidates will appear for the re-test on Sunday, nearly seven weeks after the original test was cancelled after a question paper leak—*PTI*

- The NTA has advised candidates to reach their exam centres between 11am and 1.30pm. Gates will close at 1.30pm. The exam will be in pen-and-paper mode

NTA SAYS NAGPUR STUDENT HAD OPTED FOR ABU DHABI

NAGPUR, 20 JUNE

The family of a student here claimed that he was allotted an examination centre in UAE's Abu Dhabi for the 21 June NEET-UG re-test, while the NTA stated that he himself had chosen that exam venue and now he has been given a centre in Nagpur as per his request.

The NTA said that the candidate had changed the exam centre to Abu Dhabi using his credentials.

The student, Abdulla Talib, had opted for Nagpur, Wardha, and Bhandara for the examination, his father Dr Mohammed Talib said.

"Yesterday, when we downloaded the examination card, we were shocked to see the examination centre allotted in Abu Dhabi in UAE. Subsequently, we filed a complaint with the NTA, which assured us that the correction will be done by 4 pm on Saturday," he said.

The NTA issued a fresh examination card to the candidate after allotting Nagpur as the retest centre on Saturday. — *PTI*

NEET candidate ends life in Indore

INDORE, 20 JUNE

A young NEET aspirant, named Avantika Maurya, allegedly ended her life falling from the third floor of a building in Indore, officials said.

Avantika, a resident of Dhar district, had been preparing for the medical entrance examination for the last three years.

Despite already being enrolled in a pharmacy college, she remained determined to fulfil her dream of becoming a doctor. She was reportedly under stress due to the NEET controversies and the uncertainty surrounding her future.

Avantika Maurya, a resident of Balwari Khurd in Dhar district, had been living in Indore with her elder sister, Dr Sapna Maurya, for the last three years to prepare for NEET. On Thursday night, she was talking to her cousin on phone. During the conversation, she went to the terrace. After the incident, she was rushed to a private hospital in critical condition and later shifted to MY Hospital, where she died on Friday.

Avantika's father, Dr Banshilal, is a Medical Officer in Khargone district. — *ANI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

Ebola scare in Keralam ends as woman tests -ve

KOTTAYAM, 20 JUNE

A suspected Ebola case in Keralam was confirmed negative after testing at the National Institute of Virology. The 52-year-old woman, who arrived from South Sudan via Uganda, was admitted with symptoms linked to Ebola. She was initially hospitalised with fever at a private hospital in Pala before being moved to Kottayam Medical College. Health Minister K Muraleedharan stated the concerns were now allayed, and she has been shifted to home quarantine. The medical board will decide the quarantine duration, typically 21 days, but as she no longer has symptoms, the decision is pending. Ebola spreads mainly via bodily fluids, with early symptoms including fever, sore throat, headache, and fatigue.—*PTI*

— *PTI*

Keralam HC orders protection for Kumbh girl

KOCHI, 20 JUNE

Keralam High Court has directed police to provide protection to the girl who gained fame at Prayagraj Kumbh Mela, and whose husband faces kidnapping charges. The girl, seeking protection, was granted court orders to ensure her safety while her case proceeds. The court's order came after hearing her plea and has listed the matter for 10 July. Her husband, Mohd Farman, is accused of kidnapping her in Madhya Pradesh, where her family claims she is a minor. She married in Kerala despite opposition, and her family later alleged she was underage, leading to legal action against Farman. —*ANI*

59 hospitalised in Bhiwandi with food poisoning

THANE, 20 JUNE

As many as 59 people have been admitted to Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra, with suspected food poisoning from a common stall, all in stable condition. Hospital Chief Medical Officer Madhuri Panahare confirmed the rise in patients, reporting symptoms of stomach pain, vomiting, and diarrhoea. The patients had eaten from the same food establishment. Similar incidents occurred earlier this month, including 15 children hospitalised in Telangana after consuming contaminated panipuri, and over a dozen children in Madhya Pradesh suffering from suspected water contamination. Authorities are investigating these food safety concerns.—*PTI*

— *ANI*

Discharged woman delivers baby on roadside

SRINAGAR, 20 JUNE

Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir's Bandipora district have launched an inquiry into an incident where a woman allegedly delivered a baby on the roadside after being discharged from hospital. The family of Hafeeza Begum, a resident of Chechinar Aloosa in north Kashmir, claims she was kept under observation at Bandipora District Hospital before delivering the baby outside. The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of Bandipora has formed a five-member committee to investigate, with instructions to submit a detailed report within two days. The committee includes Dr Nisar Ahmad Ganie as chairman, along with Dr Tahera Nazir, Dr Manzoor Ahmad, Dr Shabnum Ara, and Dr Junaid Ahmad.—*PTI*

Mumbaikars struggle as only 4 buses ply amid stir

MUMBAI, 20 JUNE

The strike by Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking employees evoked a near-total response so far on the second day on Saturday, with only four of 2,766 buses plying on roads in the morning.

None of the 246 scheduled BEST-owned buses had left depots, while only four wet-lease buses were on the road against the scheduled 2,521 buses, according to data released by BEST at 10 AM.

The absence of BEST buses forced students and office-goers, to opt for shared taxis or autorickshaws while some relied on bike taxis.

A student of MD College in Parel said he normally travels by bus from Dongri, but due to the strike, he had to use a bike taxi, which was more expensive.

A group of girls said they walked from the Parel railway station as finding a cab during the morning was difficult.

Some office workers said the situation was less chaotic than on Friday, as commuters were already aware of the strike and avoided waiting at bus stops.

Local trains and metro services were less crowded on Saturday, which cushioned the impact of the strike. Many office-goers opted to work from home.

The data also reflected poor attendance among operational staff, according to the BEST undertaking. — *PTI*

Police keep vigil on the second day of an indefinite strike by Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) workers in Mumbai on Saturday—*PTI*

CWC finds kids were 'abused' at Keralam Xian worship centre

PATHANAMTHITTA, 20 JUNE

A preliminary inquiry by the CWC into allegations that staffers of a Christian worship centre assaulted a 17-year-old boy found that other children housed there had similar experiences, officials said on Saturday.

The Child Welfare Committee (CWC), which launched an inquiry after the registration of a police case, found indications that more children staying at the centre had been subjected to abuse and exploitation.

The case was first registered on 17 June by the Kattappana Police in Idukki district against three staffers of the Elohim Global Worship Centre, Pathanamthitta, for allegedly assaulting the boy, a native of Anakkara.

The boy had been staying at the centre, which had promised to support his education and later help him find employment.

The case was transferred to Elavumthitta Police Station in Pathanamthitta district for investigation.

The Pathanamthitta CWC also launched an inquiry into the incident.

Child Welfare Committee Chairperson Leena K Subash told reporters here that the worship centre had been closed after the allegations surfaced.

However, the committee interacted with several people who had been staying at the centre.

Leena said three children had been staying at the worship centre.

"We have information that a mother and child were also staying there. They have to be traced," she said. — *PTI*

Normal J&K patients misled to undergo cardiac surgery

SRINAGAR, 20 JUNE

A doctor at GMC Anantnag has been suspended following an inquiry into widespread procedural irregularities, revealing that nearly half of his evaluated cardiac patients had unnecessary surgeries. The Jammu and Kashmir Health Department identified fraudulent insurance claims, exploitation, and unwarranted procedures on healthy patients, implicating Dr Syed Maqbool, a Cardiologist.

The investigation uncovered a pacemaker implantation scam involving 103 patients, with experts finding that 27 of 55 patients had normal heart function, and that there was "absolutely no medical reason" for the procedures. Dr Maqbool, an Associate Professor of Cardiology, was placed under suspension with immediate effect, and will remain attached to GMC Jammu during his suspension.

State Health Minister Sakina Itoo stated that the inquiry was initiated after receiving multiple complaints. She warned doctors to prioritise patient safety, saying, "The government had initiated the inquiry after receiving several complaints from patients." —*PTI*

Rights group wants cases against NCR workers withdrawn

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

A civil rights organisation has urged the government to immediately withdraw all cases filed against labourers during a protest in NCR earlier this year and to ensure that workers are paid the increased wages promised to them.

The appeal by Jan Hastakshep was made during the release of a report of its fact-finding team during a press conference at the Press Club of India here on Friday.

Vehicles, including police SUVs, were torched, public property vandalised, and stone-pelting was reported from industrial hubs in Noida, Gurugram and Manesar in April as protests by factory workers demanding a wage hike turned violent.

Jan Hastakshep convenor Vikas Bajpai and co-convenor Anil Dubey demanded that the allegations of "mistreatment and assault" of workers in Noida jail should be investigated and their confiscated mobile phones and other devices should be returned.

All cases against workers connected to the labour stir should be withdrawn immediately, and all arrested persons should be released, Bajpai and Dubey said. They also demanded that the government ensure the payment of the "promised wage increase" to the workers with effect from 1 April.

Considering the current condition of workers in NCR, the Jan Hastakshep team said that the governments of Uttar Prades and Haryana should immediately accept the workers' demands. — *PTI*

Vehicles, including police SUVs, were torched and public property was destroyed in the Noida industrial area last April during a workers stir—*ANI*

'CONSPIRACY UNPROVED'

Padamsinh, 7 others cleared in 2006 Cong leader Nimbalkar's murder case

MUMBAI, 20 JUNE

A special court here on Saturday acquitted former Maharashtra home minister Padamsinh Patil and seven others in the 2006 murder case of Maharashtra Congress leader Pawanraje Nimbalkar and his driver.

Special CBI court judge Satyanaryan Navandar said the prosecution failed to prove conspiracy.

The prosecution primarily relied on the testimony of the accused-turned-approver Parasmal Jain. However, the court found his testimony doubtful

Patil, a former NCP MP and stepbrother of Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar, and seven other accused faced the murder trial.

On 3 June 2006, Pawanraje Nimbalkar and his driver, Samad Kazi, were on way from Mumbai to Osmanabad (now Dharashiv), when two men intercepted their car at Kalamboli in Navi Mumbai and opened fire, killing both of them. The Navi Mumbai police initially probed the case, but the Bombay HC later transferred it to the CBI.

Patil was arrested in June 2009 after the CBI took over the case. However, a court in Alibaug (Raigad district) granted him bail in September 2009.

Besides Patil, the other accused in the case are Latur-based businessman Satish Mandade, retired state excise inspector Mohan Shukla and the shooters.

As per the CBI, Patil, the prime accused in the case, is alleged to have hatched the criminal conspiracy and paid the contract money to eliminate his cousin Pawanraje Nimbalkar.

The prosecution alleged that Parasmal Jain initially accepted the contract of Rs 30 lakh from Mohan Shukla and Satish Mandade to kill Pawanraje Nimbalkar. He was later granted pardon and turned approver. — *PTI*

Sena (UBT) MP Omprakash Nimbalkar arrives in court during a hearing in the murder case of his father Congress leader Nimbalkar on Saturday—*PTI*

CASE TIMELINE

3 June 2006: Pawanraje Nimbalkar and his driver Samad Kazi were shot dead in a car at Kalamboli. Police and CID handle the probe.

23 October 2008: Bombay HC transfers the case to CBI as Nimbalkar's family dissatisfied.

7 June 2009: CBI arrests NCP MP Padamsinh for plotting and funding the murder. Subsequently, 8 others were also held.

August 2009: The CBI files a 5,000-page charge sheet against Patil, Satish Mandade, Mohan Shukla, Parasmal Jain, Dinesh Tiwari, Mahatam Chaudhary alias Pintu Chaudhary, Kailash Yadav, Gyanendra Pandey Pandey and Kulkarni. Jain turns approver and testifies for the prosecution in 2021.

September 2009: Padamsinh Patil granted bail by Alibaug court.

July 2011: trial starts

November 2012: The SC transfers the case to Mumbai as witnesses turn hostile.

July 2019: Anna Hazare deposes as prosecution witness. He says he came to know about the double murder through the media and that a contract was given to the shooters to eliminate him too.

July 2025: Examination of prosecution witness over, summonses issued to defence witnesses

14 May 2026: Matter listed for verdict. Adjourned as Padamsinh and co-accused Mohan Shukla fail to appear, citing severe health issues.

16 June 2026: Court adjourns matter as judge says he needs more time.

20 June 2026: All eight accused acquitted as court finds approver's testimony doubtful

JOURNEY OF FAITH

A 'Sadhu' travels in an auto-rickshaw to Kamkhya Temple ahead of Ambubachi Mela, in Guwahati, Assam, on Saturday. The festival celebrates the symbolic annual menstruation cycle of Goddess Kamakhya, symbolising fertility and the nurturing power of Mother Earth. The temple stays shut for three days and opens on the fourth day to thousands of devotees, who wait for a small piece of sacred red cloth associated with the rituals –PTI

El Nino pushes Andhra farmers to save water

Majji Satyam has been watching the sky since May. The 52-year-old farmer from JR Puram village in Andhra Pradesh's Srikakulam district has five acres, two borewells, and a lifetime of growing paddy the way his father did – raise seedlings in a nursery, transplant them into flooded fields and keep the water standing until harvest.

This kharif season, backed by years of training from the family-owned trust Dr Reddy's Foundation, one of the beneficiaries of CSR funds of pharma major Dr Reddy's Laboratories, he is trying something different.

"Last year, rains had arrived in May itself. This year it has not yet come. I have heard that the rainfall will be less due to El Nino," Satyam told PTI.

"So I have decided to try DSR." DSR – Direct Seeded Rice – skips the nursery entirely. Seeds go straight into the field. No transplantation, no waterlogging, no standing puddles.

For a farmer staring down a lean monsoon, it is an attractive proposition. Satyam is not alone. Across Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts, where the Dr Reddy's Foundation works with farmers in over 1,500 villages covering roughly 10 lakh acres of paddy area as part of the Action for Climate and Environment (ACE) programme, a generation of cultivators is being quietly nudged away from water-intensive methods.

State agricultural departments and Krishi Vighyan Kendras, with whom the foundation works closely, are reinforcing the message – advising farmers to reduce paddy acreage, switch to short-duration crops, or move to pulses and cereals.

"If El Nino gets severe, we will cultivate paddy for house consumption only," Satyam said.

R Sanyas Rao, 50, from the same village, did not wait for a bad year to make the switch. Associated with the Foundation since 2014 – three years before Satyam joined – he tried wet DSR on five acres last kharif and found it worked. Labour costs dropped. Nursery management vanished as a headache.

Transplantation costs disappeared. This year, Rao is going further: dry DSR on two acres, maize on three. "With the borewell facility, I will be able to manage," he said.

The numbers make the case bluntly. Conventional paddy cultivation is an extraordinarily water guzzling method. DSR and Alternate Wetting and Drying – AWD, a technique where fields are flooded and drained in cycles rather than kept continuously submerged – dramatically cut that demand.

"Dry DSR method saves around 11-12 lakh litres of water per acre. Wet DSR saves around 4-5.5 lakh litres AWD saves roughly 3-5 lakh litres of water compared to traditional methods," said Suman Saraswathibatla, Director (Rural Livelihoods and Climate Action) at Dr Reddy's Foundation.

Last year, farmers in two districts adopted DSR across 3,667 acres and AWD across 21,963 acres, saving more than 3,000 crore litres of water and reducing over 50,000 tonne equivalent carbon dioxide. With El Nino back in the forecast, those numbers are expected to rise significantly, he said.

For both techniques to work well, soil moisture must remain consistent in the upper 30-40 cm of the field – a critical condition that shapes when and how farmers decide to sow.

Being a cyclone and rainfed belt, Srikakulam's sowing calendar has already changed. Traditionally, paddy went in at the end of June. Over the last three to four years, sowing has shifted to July, with peak transplantation moving to August.

To bridge the gap, the Foundation has been encouraging farmers to plant short-duration cover crops – black gram, green gram, sesamum – in the May-June window before kharif begins. Green manuring crops like sun hemp and napier help retain soil moisture in the interim.

Last year, cover crops were grown across 2,372 acres; agro-forestry – mixing timber and fruit plants in coconut orchards – covered 1,508 acres.

Underlying all of this is a quiet crisis in Srikakulam's soil health. The foundation through its own state-of-art Hyderabad facility launched in January 2025 is providing soil health test results quickly along with actionable crop advisories.

Over 5,000 soil health cards were issued last year and the findings are consistent: organic carbon levels are very low. Micronutrients like sulphur, zinc, and boron are deficient. Potash is in excess.

"Site-specific nutrient management is one of our major interventions this year, especially given the combination of El Nino effects and the fertilizer crunch. We're pushing hard to bring in as many samples as possible," Suman said.

For the past five years, the Foundation has been running awareness campaigns – bulk SMS messages, posters, farm extension meetings – urging farmers to apply fertilisers more precisely, based on what their specific soil actually needs rather than what habit or convenience suggests.

It is slow work, changing practices that have been handed down across generations. But in a district where water is becoming an annual gamble, farmers like Satyam and Rao are finding that the old ways may no longer be the safest bet.

"There is more awareness being created to adopt DSR instead of paddy transplantation," Rao said. "I will decide on the sowing operation in July." The monsoon, as ever, will have the final word. —PTI

SALAR ساہر

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF YOGA

Yoga boosts cognition, eases depression in Alzheimer's

Yoga may help improve cognition, reduce depressive symptoms and partially restore healthy gut bacteria in people with Alzheimer's disease, according to a new study by researchers at the AIIMS, Delhi.

The collaborative study by Departments of Anatomy and Neurology, published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease in June, found that a 12-week structured yoga programme was associated with significant improvements in cognitive performance and mood, alongside favourable changes in the gut microbiome of patients with mild Alzheimer's disease.

The study provides preliminary evidence that lifestyle interventions such as yoga may help create a healthier microbial environment in the gut, Dr Rima Dada, Professor in the Department of Anatomy at AIIMS and also the corresponding author of the study, said.

"The enrichment of beneficial bacteria and reduction of pro-inflammatory microbes after yoga point towards biological mechanisms that could contribute to improved brain health," she said.

Dr Manjari Tripathi, Head of Department, Neurology, AIIMS Delhi, said, "While yoga cannot be considered a cure for Alzheimer's disease, our findings suggest that it may serve as a valuable adjunctive therapy in early Almheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment. We observed improvements in cognition and mood, along with favourable changes in the gut microbiome, indicating a possible influence on the gut-brain axis."

Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, is characterised by progressive memory loss and cognitive decline. Increasing evidence suggests that alterations in gut microbes may influence brain health through what scientists call the "gut-brain axis". The study involved patients with clinically diagnosed mild Alzheimer's disease and cognitively healthy individuals.

The Alzheimer's patients underwent supervised 60-minute yoga sessions every day for 12 weeks, while researchers assessed their cognitive performance, depressive symptoms and gut microbial composition before and after the intervention.

According to the findings, Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA) scores, a widely used measure of cognitive function, improved significantly after the yoga programme.

At the same time, depression scores measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) showed a marked decline.

Researchers also observed notable shifts in gut microbial composition following the intervention.

Beneficial bacteria known to produce short-chain fatty acids -- compounds linked to reduced inflammation and better gut and brain health -- increased after yoga.

These included faecalibacterium prausnitzii, roseburia intestinalis, bifidobacterium and akkermansia.

In contrast, levels of potentially harmful and pro-inflammatory microbes such as collinsella aerofaciens and klebsiella species declined.

The analysis further showed that the gut microbial profiles of Alzheimer's patients moved closer to those of healthy participants after the yoga programme, suggesting a partial restoration of microbial balance.

The findings support the possibility that yoga exerts beneficial effects on the gut-brain axis by reducing stress, improving autonomic nervous system regulation and creating a more favourable environment for beneficial microbes, the authors said.

"These microbial and functional improvements were accompanied by enhanced cognitive performance and reduced depressive symptoms, suggesting beneficial modulation of the gut-brain axis in Alzheimer's disease participants," the researchers noted.

However, they cautioned that the study had important limitations, including a small sample size and the absence of a control group undergoing another form of intervention.

The authors said larger randomised controlled trials with longer follow-up, dietary monitoring and integration of metabolomic and immune markers would be needed to confirm whether yoga directly causes the observed microbiome and cognitive changes.

Despite the limitations, the study adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting that yoga could serve as an accessible, low-cost, non-pharmacological adjunct to support cognitive and emotional health in people living with Alzheimer's disease. —PTI

The study involved patients with clinically diagnosed mild Alzheimer's disease and cognitively healthy individuals –PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Paschimbanga Divas revives debate over Bengal's birth

Nearly 79 years after legislators from western Bengal voted to join India, paving the way for the creation of West Bengal, June 20 has re-emerged as a potent political symbol, reopening old debates over Partition, identity and historical memory.

As the BJP government marks Paschimbanga Divas with official ceremonies across the state for the first time on this date, the observance has evolved from a largely forgotten date into a political marker in a wider contest over how Bengal remembers its birth and defines its identity.

Unlike most states whose foundation days commemorate linguistic aspirations or administrative reorganisation, West Bengal was born amid the upheaval of partition, communal violence and mass migration. That history, long relegated to the margins of public discourse, has acquired fresh political resonance under the BJP, which sees 20 June as a defining moment in the state's journey within the Indian Union.

For the BJP, the day symbolises the campaign led by Syama Prasad Mookerjee that ultimately led to the state's formation. Its critics, however, see the observance as an attempt to reinterpret a complex historical process through a contemporary ideological lens.

The significance of 20 June lies in the events of 1947, when legislators from the western districts of undivided Bengal voted in favour of partition and joining India, a decision that laid the foundation for the state that emerged after Independence.

Yet the debate over Paschimbanga Divas is no longer confined to history. At its heart lies a larger political contest over how Bengal's origins are remembered, what defines its identity, and who gets to tell its founding story.

"The Congress, CPI(M) and the TMC deliberately kept this history hidden because the role of Syama Prasad Mookerjee and the nationalist movement behind the creation of West Bengal would have come to light," BJP MP Rahul Sinha said.

Historians often trace an important turning point to the Simla Deputation of 1906, when Muslim leaders led by Aga Khan sought separate electorates from Viceroy Lord Minto. The demand was later incorporated into the Indian Councils Act of 1909, embedding communal representation within colonial politics.

The formation of the All India Muslim League in Dhaka later that year and the subsequent growth of communal politics gradually altered Bengal's political landscape. By the 1940s, the Pakistan movement had gathered momentum, particularly in Muslim-majority provinces such as Bengal.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari during the 'Paschimbanga Divas' (West Bengal Day) celebration at Tarakeswar, in Hooghly district, on Saturday – PTI

The communal violence that followed the Muslim League's Direct Action Day call in August 1946 and the Noakhali riots later that year profoundly influenced political opinion in Bengal.

It was in this backdrop that then Hindu Mahasabha leader Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who was leading the Bengali Hindu Homeland movement, emerged as the principal advocate of partitioning Bengal, arguing that if India was to be divided, the province's Hindu-majority western districts should remain within India.

He opposed proposals for a sovereign and undivided Bengal championed by leaders such as Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy.

The undivided Bengal Legislative Assembly had 250 members, including 115 elected from reserved Muslim seats and 78 from general constituencies, with the rest representing special interests such as Anglo-Indians, Europeans, zamindars and universities. The Congress had 87 members. At a joint sitting on 20 June, 1947, altogether 120 members voted for a united Bengal, falling short of the support needed to determine the province's future.

Legislators from western Bengal voted 58-21 in favour of partition and joining India, while members from eastern Bengal voted 107-34 to join Pakistan.

This birthed West Bengal and East Bengal, the latter becoming East Pakistan before emerging as Bangladesh in 1971. Yet, 20 June never acquired official prominence after Independence.

Successive Congress, Left Front and TMC governments did not institutionalise the date as a major state observance.

"The dominant political culture in Bengal after Independence emphasised Bengali linguistic and cultural identity rather than Partition politics. Unlike Punjab, where Partition memory remained central to politics, Bengal's mainstream discourse gradually shifted towards secularism, class politics and cultural nationalism," political scientist Biswanath Chakraborty said.

The BJP's rise has altered that discourse. By formally embracing Paschimbanga Divas, the party is seeking to bring Bengal's Partition-era history closer to the centre of public consciousness.

For years, the BJP and organisations representing refugee groups have argued that the events leading to West Bengal's creation, and the role played by Mookerjee, remained underemphasised in the state's official historical narrative. The party places him at the centre of Bengal's survival as an Indian state, arguing that the province's partition was shaped by fears generated by communal violence and the prospect of living in a Muslim-majority province.

Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari has described 20 June as one of the most important and destiny-defining days in the history of West Bengal.

TMC earlier promoted Poila Baisakh, the Bengali New Year, as a more inclusive symbol of Bengali identity, reflecting its preference for a cultural rather than partition-centric commemoration. —PTI

—SCREENGRAB

7 killed in twin blasts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR, 20 JUNE

At least seven people were killed and three injured on Saturday in twin roadside explosions in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police confirmed. The blasts occurred in Marka Bera, Bannu district. No group has claimed responsibility yet. According to Bannu District Police Officer Yasir Afridi, the first explosion involved an IED planted along the roadside, which struck a passenger van travelling from Hathi Khel village to Bannu city, killing five instantly. A second blast targeted rescue efforts, killing two more and damaging a vehicle. The injured and bodies were taken to nearby hospital, with an investigation underway. KP Chief Minister Sohail Afridi condemned the incident as "highly tragic" and assured support to families, ordering a detailed inquiry. —*PTI*

—SCREENGRAB

One killed as 2 trains collide in the UK

LONDON, 20 JUNE

Emergency services responded to a train crash north of London, near Bedford, on Friday afternoon, resulting in at least one death. Both southbound trains from Corby and Nottingham, heading to London St Pancras, collided around 5.15pm. A passenger described being thrown forward and witnessing injured travellers with broken bones and blood. Peter Knapp, a rear carriage passenger, said, "There was a moment of being flung into the chair in front, and then I saw smoke. People were crying, screaming. People were so scared and confused." Photos showed injured and uninjured individuals amid emergency response. East Midlands Railway confirmed the collision involved the 4.40pm train from Corby, leading to cancellations. —*PTI*

16 KILLED AS ISRAEL POUNDS LEBANON

Death toll in Lebanon crosses 4,000; Hezbollah says it will respect ceasefire but fight IDF

BEIRUT, 20 JUNE

Israeli strikes on southern Lebanon on Saturday killed at least 16 people, including two children, hours after reports of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah.

The persistent fighting is increasingly threatening the interim agreement between Iran and the US to end the war in West Asia.

Lebanon's National News Agency said the strikes hit the southern town of Nabatiyeh and nearby villages. At least seven people remained trapped under the rubble, it said.

The strikes come a day after Israel killed at least 47 people in Lebanon and Hezbollah killed four Israeli soldiers.

An Israeli military official said Hezbollah had fired more than 50 projectiles at Israeli forces in southern Lebanon overnight, prompting the military to start targeting the militant group there.

A general view shows rubble from buildings destroyed in Israeli strikes along the waterfront in the southern port city of Tyre, Lebanon —*PTI*

The army said it struck dozens of Hezbollah targets and militants in southern Lebanon, including rocket-launching positions and Hezbollah command centers.

On Saturday, Hezbollah said it had committed to the ceasefire but blamed Israel for violating it several times on Friday night. A statement issued by the group's military wing said it would abide by the ceasefire but would also repel attacks by Israeli troops.

"What concerns us is that the enemy fully and comprehensively respects the ceasefire, and doesn't attempt to attack our country and villages or seek to occupy any new position," senior Hezbollah official Hassan Fadlallah said according to NNA.

A strike on the village of Barish killed four members of a family, parents and two children. In Arab Salim village, a body was pulled from a destroyed house, and in the villages of Doueir and Kfar Rumman, drone strikes killed a person on a motorcycle and a Lebanese soldier. Nine people were killed in strikes in the villages of Qannarit, Sohmor and Shehour.

With the latest strikes, the death toll in Lebanon has now surpassed 4,000, the country's health ministry announced on Saturday. Over a million people have been displaced by the fighting.

Israel's strikes on Lebanon have increasingly alienated the US, with President Donald Trump publicly attacking Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu multiple times.

In a call with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday reaffirmed Washington's support for Lebanon's security, stability, and efforts to extend the state's authority across all its territories. This comes after Israel said it would not let the hundreds of thousands of civilians return to their homes in southern Lebanon, where the IDF has set up a "security zone". —*Agencies*

US may seek Qatar help on Iran fund

The US is working with Qatar to chart a plan for releasing billions of dollars in frozen funds available to Iran for humanitarian spending, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday citing sources. While the plan is not complete yet, report said that it is aimed at giving Iran access to spend and utilise some of its estimated USD 100 billion in cash frozen worldwide--with the first access being to the USD 6 billion held in Qatar. Doha is likely to purchase humanitarian goods like food and medicines ordered by Iran's central bank by utilising money drawn from Tehran's frozen assets. —*PTI*

US President Donald Trump unveils the newly designated Air Force One aircraft, a gift from Qatar, at Joint Base Andrews —*PTI*

No press freedom in Pak, Qatar: Vance

US Vice President JD Vance said that the details of the US-Iran deal were not released to the public because key mediators Qatar and Pakistan don't have freedom of press. In an interview with the New York Times on Friday Vance said he would have liked to have published the "Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding" earlier, but there is no expectations in the Pakistani and Qatari systems that people will "actually interrogate and look at and analyse and understand for themselves" the deal as there is no "First Amendment and freedom of the press" in those countries. —*PTI*

Israel bombs kill 2 children in Gaza

One child has been killed in Gaza per day since ceasefire in October: UN

An Israeli strike hit an apartment in Gaza City at 2.00am on Saturday, killing at least two children in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian health officials said. The toll is likely to rise as rescue teams work on recovering more bodies. There was no immediate information on the number of the wounded. The bodies of the two sisters, 4-year-old Zina and 14-year-old Lana, were sent to Shifa Hospital's morgue. The family said that the rocket fell without a warning.

Despite an October ceasefire, Israeli attacks that have killed over 1,007 Palestinians, the Gaza Health Ministry said. —*PTI*

B'desh Hindus protest Ram 'desecration'

DHAKA, 20 JUNE

A Hindu organisation in Bangladesh called the United Sanatani Society held a torchlight procession in Dhaka on Friday, in protest against the alleged desecration of a statue of Lord Ram.

Participants from several Hindu religious, social and cultural organisations, monasteries and temples chanted slogans such as "Jai Shri Ram" while walking the route. They also spoke against religiously offensive social media content.

The protesters presented an eight-point charter of demands, asking for the arrest and punishment of those allegedly involved in the desecration, strict action against hate speech on social media, security for temples and religious institutions, the establishment of a minority protection commission, and stronger measures against communal violence and religious discrimination.

Hindu organisation in Bangladesh called United Sanatani Society hold a torchlight procession in protest against the insult to Lord Ram —*ANI*

The march was organised in response to allegations that recently, a violent mob desecrated a statue of Lord Ram by placing a shoe on it.

An under-construction temple of Lord Ram was also halted in the north of Bangladesh due to some extremist groups allegedly causing unrest and throwing shoes at the statue of Ram in the temple. A case has been filed but no one has been arrested in the incident so far.

Protestors said that if the culprit is not arrested within 72 hours, they will submit a memorandum to the Ministry of Religious Affairs on Sunday. They also plan to meet the Prime Minister. —*ANI*

Cuba opens its economy for privatisation

HAVANA, 20 JUNE

Cuba approved of free-market reforms in what observers called the most sweeping economic overhaul since the Cuban revolution in the 50s that saw the island shift into a one-party Marxist-Leninist state.

The 176 measures aim to further decentralise Cuba's state-run economy, which has been left gasping by US President Donald Trump's embargo.

Under the island's current economic model, the government largely determines what is produced, who produces it, the prices at which goods are sold and how the country's resources are allocated.

The plan includes more space for private businesses, imports and exports without state intermediation, free hiring of personnel, authorisation for private banks and investment by Cubans abroad. It even permits fast-food chains to establish themselves on the island.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said that the proposed measures were based on an analysis of the Vietnamese and Chinese models, communist countries with market economies.

In passing the reform, Cuban authorities cautioned that implementation could be slow, and noted measures will not be viable if the US does not lift the energy and financial embargo on the island. —*PTI*

Bolivia declares emergency amid ongoing protests

LA PAZ, 20 JUNE

Bolivia's crisis deepened on Saturday as President Rodrigo Paz declared a state of emergency, allowing wider military deployment to clear blockades and restore order after over 50 days of protests. This gives Paz broader constitutional powers, including sending armed forces to remove blockades.

Protesters, many linked to ex-President Evo Morales, have blocked key roads, disrupting supplies of food, fuel, and medicines to La Paz and other areas. The unrest initially stemmed from Paz's decision to cut fuel subsidies amid a dollar shortage and IMF negotiations. Despite attempts to stabilise fuel prices and reverse land reforms, protests grew, demanding wage hikes and Paz's resignation.

Paz announced the measures in a live address, following a deal with the Bolivian Workers' Confederation, though rural groups, aligned with Morales, continue protests. Paz said the crisis was an organised attempt to destabilise democracy, emphasising the emergency aims to restore order and protect citizens. —*Agencies*

Polish PM flays Prez for insult to Zelenskyy

WARSAW, 20 JUNE

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk criticised President Karol Nawrocki on Saturday for revoking the Order of the White Eagle from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, warning that escalating disputes between Warsaw and Kyiv could serve Russian interests. Tusk stated that historical disagreements should not undermine strategic cooperation, especially amid Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine.

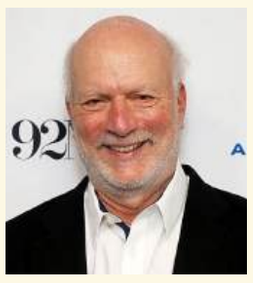
He emphasised, "We have the right to discuss difficult historical issues, but we must never forget who benefits from conflict between Poland and Ukraine. Every weakening of this relationship is welcomed in Moscow."

Polish President Karol Nawrocki revoked the Order of the White Eagle from Ukrainian President —*X/ ZELENSKYYUA*

The dispute arose after Nawrocki announced Zelenskyy would lose the honour following Ukraine's decision to name a military unit after the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).

While Nawrocki said honouring the UPA "hurts the memory of Polish victims" and hampers reconciliation, Tusk suggested symbolic gestures should be considered against broader security interests.

The disagreement underscores growing tensions between Poland's government and the president over Ukraine relations, despite extensive cooperation since Russia's invasion in 2022. —*PTI*



'Friends' director Jimmy Burrows dies at 85

LONDON, 20 JUNE

Jimmy Burrows, renowned co-creator of 'Cheers' and a prolific director of over 1,000 episodes of TV comedy including 'Friends', 'The Big Bang Theory', and 'Will and Grace', has died peacefully surrounded by his family. Attorney Tom Hoberman confirmed Burrows' death "with great sadness" to CBS News. His family described him as "one of the most influential and beloved directors in television history," with a career spanning more than 50 years, during which he won 11 Emmy Awards and five Directors Guild of America Awards.

Born in Los Angeles in 1940, Burrows spent much of his childhood in New York, and studied directing at Yale School of Drama. His legacy includes mentoring generations of comedy creators, with the Directors Guild recognising him as "an incredibly generous colleague". Actor Eric McCormack called him "the 800 lb gorilla of television comedy for fifty years," while Lisa Kudrow thanked him for "everything". —*Agencies*

$400 MILLION ANNUAL FUND

US to stop AIDS funding for South Africa

WASHINGTON, 20 JUNE

The US government has said it will no longer fund programmes to prevent, treat, and control the spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, which has the highest HIV case burden in the world at more than 8 million patients.

Until 2025, the US was funding around $400M annually to help South Africa counter the disease, through the President's Emergency Fund for Aids Relief (Pepfar).

The US State Department appeared to suggest that the decision was taken because according to an executive order passed by Trump shortly after his inauguration, the South African government has 'failed' to protect the white Afrikaner community in the country, a minority. South Africa has repeatedly refuted this charge and said that its Black Economic Empowerment policy is needed to address economic inequality stemming from the country's apartheid era. A US official said the US government wanted South Africa to be self-reliant rather than dependent on American funding.

Until 2025, the US was funding around $400M annually to help South Africa counter the disease *FREEPIK*

- The decision was taken because according to an executive order passed by Trump, the South African government has 'failed' to protect the white Afrikaner community

Meanwhile, South Africa's health ministry said that it has "long been working on a self-reliance plan" but that it did not have prior information of this decision. It added that while Pepfar was an important funding source for the country's HIV programme, the life-saving antiretroviral drugs needed to combat the disease is funded separately, mostly by the government. —*Salar News*

Africa CDC says continent needs own funds for Ebola

ADDIS ABABA, 20 JUNE

African officials must step up financing to respond and develop vaccines for the Ebola outbreak in Congo and Uganda, the continent's top health agency, the Africa Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention said on Friday.

Africa CDC Director-General Jean Kaseya told The Associated Press (AP) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, that the current outbreak – the worst ever at this stage – is yet another reminder for Africa to invest more in its health sector to reduce its reliance on foreign partners.

The continent, whose population is projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050, produces less than 1 per cent of its vaccine needs and 3 per cent of medicine that is brought in from abroad, making millions of people vulnerable to epidemics.

- CDC official said the current outbreak – the worst ever at this stage – is yet another reminder for Africa to invest more in its health sector

Kaseya added that the peak of the Ebola outbreak is still to come because of slow progress in identifying and monitoring contacts. The outbreak has so far claimed more than 200 lives out of 894 confirmed cases since 15 May, with up to 35,000 contacts to be traced. —*PTI*

West Asia conflict: India diversifies LPG imports

This comes as OMCs absorb rising price shock

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

India sharply diversified its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) sourcing during the West Asia conflict, increasing imports from the US, Iran and several other countries to reduce dependence on the Gulf region, while state-owned fuel retailers absorbed much of the surge in international prices to shield households.

Before the conflict, roughly 90 per cent of India's LPG imports came from West Asia, leaving the country heavily exposed to regional disruptions. By April 2026, the US accounted for nearly one-third of India's LPG imports, up from just 8 per cent in February, according to a Crisil report.

The shift was aided by a 2.2 million tonne-per-year LPG supply agreement signed with the US in late 2025, equivalent to about 10 per cent of India's annual import requirement. Iran also re-entered India's import basket, accounting for 6 per cent of April imports. Supplies were also sourced from countries such as Argentina, Chile, France, and the Netherlands.

The disruption, nevertheless, weighed heavily on demand. LPG consumption fell to 2.47 million tonnes in April from 3.2 million tonnes in February as tighter availability and rising prices curbed usage.

After growing 6 per cent to a record 33.2 million tonnes in fiscal 2026, India's LPG consumption declined 13 per cent year-on-year in both March and April, before falling 20 per cent in May.

Commercial and industrial users bore the brunt of the decline, with consumption dropping more sharply than household demand as market-linked customers responded quickly to higher prices and supply constraints.

Crisil said the conflict also triggered a sharp increase in global LPG prices as markets priced in supply risks and elevated freight costs. However, the increase was only partially passed on to domestic consumers.

The price of a 14.2-kg household LPG cylinder in Delhi rose about 10 per cent between February and June, while the price of a 19-kg commercial cylinder surged more than 79 per cent.

A modest rise in household cooking gas prices sharply increased oil companies' under-recoveries as procurement costs exceeded retail prices. Under-recoveries on domestic LPG cylinders in Delhi reached Rs 651 per cylinder in May, with fuel retailers incurring nearly Rs 22,000 crore in cumulative losses during March–May.

While diversification and higher domestic production helped cushion the impact, the sector remains vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions, freight market volatility and swings in international energy prices, underscoring the importance of maintaining a broader import portfolio, the report added. *—ANI*

AS PER REPORT

Tata group on the hunt for new Air India CEO

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Nipun Aggarwal and Vinod Kannan have emerged as the front-runners to be Chief Executive Officer Air India –*x*

- The crossroads comes at a time of difficulty for the airline, which is grappling with major losses from the conflict in West Asia.

The Tata group is weighing its options as Nipun Aggarwal and Vinod Kannan have emerged as the front-runners to be the Chief Executive Officer of the beleaguered Air India, reported the Financial Times. This comes after Campbell Wilson announced his resignation in April.

Aggarwal is a strong internal candidate, disciplined and with an eye on cost and operational efficiency, as the airline's chief commercial officer and the person who led its transformation strategy. He is said to have the support of Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran, who himself currently faces an uncertain future at the company, with his term ending in 2027. But some wonder if he has enough experience to run the global airline.

Kannan, meanwhile, was the Chief Executive of Vistara prior to its merger with Air India. He enjoys the respect of the aviation industry as a capable figurehead.

The crossroads comes at a time of difficulty for the airline, which is grappling with major losses from the conflict in West Asia, the closure of Pakistani airspace to Indian flights and the aftermath of the Boeing 787 Dreamliner crash in Ahmedabad, which is still under investigation. Air India reported a loss of about $2.8 billion for the FY26.

The US-Israel-Iran war has forced the airline to reduce flights by about 20% due to route disruptions and rising fuel costs. The restrictions on Pakistani airspace have cost the airline nearly $600 million a year. The crash, meanwhile, was a disaster for the airline's image, causing major safety concerns as 260 lives were lost. The carrier is also focusing on modernising its fleet, but supply chain issues have delayed the delivery of the 570 new aircraft it has ordered. *— Salar News*

Flipkart leads e-commerce, Myntra dominates fashion, says BofA

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Bank of America reported Flipkart Group's widening lead in India's e-commerce market, alongside Myntra's in online fashion, despite fierce sector competition. Citing Sensor Tower DAU data and industry checks, the report states Flipkart remains the top in user engagement as of June 2026, while Myntra continues in fashion.

The findings suggest that competitive pressures have yet to impact Flipkart's position, even as rivals invest heavily to gain market share. BofA notes Myntra's leadership in fashion is strengthening, especially in premium fashion and beauty, aided by limited competition.

Although challengers have attempted to carve out space, Myntra's user engagement trends show it consolidates its advantage. The report also points to signs of improving consumer sentiment following a decline in global commodity prices after the US-Iran peace agreement.

Easing inflation and macroeconomic improvements are expected to support consumption growth. Shipment trends at third-party logistics providers indicate sustained demand, with no impact from weaker discretionary spending.

Valuations across India's internet sector have corrected recently amid concerns of slowing growth and AI disruption, but business performance remains resilient. The report expects early benefits from AI adoption, mainly through personalised customer engagement and cost savings.

With demand and logistics volumes strong, Flipkart is well-positioned to benefit from any uptick in spending, despite fears of a slowdown in consumer expenditure. *—PTI*

ALPHAFOLD DEVELOPER

Nobel winner quits Google for Anthropic

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Renowned scientist **John Jumper** announced his exit from Google DeepMind after nearly nine years to join Anthropic following a short break. Jumper shared the update on Friday, expressing gratitude for his long association with DeepMind and reflecting on his journey from a newly minted PhD to leading one of the most influential AI research teams in the world.

Jumper credited DeepMind CEO Demis Hassabis for giving him an early opportunity to lead the AlphaFold project just six months after completing his PhD. He described DeepMind as a "special place" that shaped his scientific thinking and collaborative approach, adding that he remains eager to see the organisation's future breakthroughs.

During his tenure, Jumper played a central role in the development of AlphaFold, an AI system that revolutionised protein structure prediction and significantly advanced the field of structural biology. The breakthrough has been widely regarded as one of the most important applications of artificial intelligence in science, enabling researchers to better understand disease mechanisms and drug discovery pathways.

At Anthropic, a leading AI safety and research company, Jumper is expected to contribute to cutting-edge AI systems focused on reliability, interpretability, and responsible development.

John Jumper is a computational biologist and AI researcher best known for co-leading the AlphaFold project at Google DeepMind. With a PhD in theoretical chemistry, he joined DeepMind and quickly rose to prominence in the field of protein structure prediction.

Alongside his colleagues, he helped develop AlphaFold2, which achieved unprecedented accuracy in predicting protein folding. In recognition of these contributions, Jumper was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2024, jointly with other key contributors to AlphaFold's development.

His work has had far-reaching impact across biology and medicine, accelerating research in drug discovery and molecular science *—PTI*

NO MAJOR RISE IN PETROL, DIESEL PRICES: PURI

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri stated that petrol and diesel prices in India have not seen a significant increase despite global crude oil market volatility.

During the Centre's 12-year anniversary celebrations of Narendra Modi's government, Puri noted that Sonbhadra is transforming into a model district, shedding its backward image.

He explained that Modi reduced excise duty multiple times, with the government bearing around Rs 10 per litre on petrol and diesel.

Puri noted that fuel prices had increased only marginally by Rs 7.60 since 2022 and that current prices are lower than during the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

He added that oil companies hold stocks purchased at higher prices, and prices could soften when lower-priced crude arrives. Puri also noted India's rapid progress under Modi. *—PTI*

AMAZON DROPS GUADAGNINO'S FILM ON SAM ALTMAN

LOS ANGELES, 20 JUNE

Luca Guadagnino's upcoming film, 'Artificial', on OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, is no longer backed by Amazon MGM. It is being shopped to studios for distribution.

'Artificial' chronicles the brief period in 2023 when Altman was fired from OpenAI before being reinstated as chief executive days later.

The film, featuring Andrew Garfield as Altman, was dropped by Amazon MGM despite being in the final stages of completion, reported Variety.

Variety said the film had undergone multiple test screenings that received a positive audiencesresponses before Amazon's decision.

It also said the project was screened for other studios on Thursday as producers began exploring alternative distribution options.

The development comes months after Amazon and OpenAI announced a major partnership to expand the AI firm's use of Amazon Web Services and develope customised AI models.

To which for Amazon said the studio holds Guadagnino in high regard and remains interested in working with him in the future. *—PTI*

BoP outlook up, INR pressure to ease

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Goldman Sachs cut its current account deficit forecasts, adding that India posted a $7.2bn BoP surplus in Q1 CY26 –*AI*

- Goldman Sachs sees a smaller hit from higher oil prices due to "improved energy efficiency

India's Balance of Payments (BoP) outlook looks more favourable than the rupee's recent weakness suggests, with a Q1 CY26 surplus and lower oil and gold import assumptions prompting Goldman Sachs to cut its current account deficit forecasts, the brokerage said in a research report. It added that India posted a $7.2bn BoP surplus in Q1 CY26.

Goldman Sachs sees a smaller hit from higher oil prices due to "improved energy efficiency, rising transport electrification, and a shift toward less energy-intensive growth." Post-pandemic, oil import volumes decline more when oil rises above $80/bbl. As a result, higher oil prices may not translate into a proportionate increase in India's oil import bill.

Incorporating lower oil and gold import assumptions and better-than-expected Q1 data, the brokerage lowered its current account deficit forecast to 1.3 per cent of GDP in CY26 and 1.7 per cent of GDP in FY27.

On capital flows, Goldman Sachs expects RBI measures to underpin inflows. With an estimated $60bn of additional inflows from these measures, Goldman Sachs expects India to record a BoP surplus of around 0.6% of GDP in CY26 and FY27 each. On the rupee, the brokerage said depreciation pressure should ease but significant appreciation is unlikely. *—ANI*

PHONEPE WALLET FEE WON'T IMPACT BANK ACCOUNTS

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

PhonePe has clarified that inactivity fees on dormant Wallets do not impact users' bank accounts or UPI transactions, following confusion caused by notifications sent to some customers. The notifications only concern the PhonePe Wallet, a prepaid payment instrument (PPI), and not payments made via UPI, which debits funds directly from bank accounts.

Many users mistakenly believe their PhonePe account, UPI account, and Wallet are the same; in reality, they operate independently under different rules. PhonePe assured that no deductions will be made from linked bank accounts or UPI, and Wallet balances will not become negative.

Wallet activity and UPI activity are tracked separately; a Wallet may be inactive even if the user regularly makes UPI payments. Affected users are notified 15 days before any fee deduction, with options to reactivate, add funds, withdraw, or close the Wallet.

Reactivation can be done via OTP verification and a transaction, without needing Full KYC. Cashback rewards are usually stored separately in Gift Card Balance, not Wallets, and do not automatically indicate Wallet activity.

Wallets are regulated as prepaid instruments and require maintenance fees for inactivity; the fees apply only to the Wallet's balance. *—PTI*

ANNUAL HOLIDAY RETIRES

Gen Z prefers weekend, short trips: Report

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

70 per cent of Gen Z participants prefer multiple short trips over one annual vacation –*AI*

Gen Z in India has quietly swapped the annual holiday for frequent weekend getaways and short breaks, with 87 per cent preferring trips that last under a week, according to an Airbnb research report.

According to a report based on a survey of 2,012 Gen Z respondents aged 18-29 across 11 Indian cities in April 2026, weekend trips are preferred, followed by three- to five-day breaks. Longer holidays are the exception.

The report found that 70 per cent prefer multiple short trips over one annual vacation, 66 per cent book at short notice, and 67 per cent seek unique experiences each time. Reflecting this, 87 per cent say their travel style represents their identity, while 92% want destinations and stays that match their personal taste rather than popular trends.

About 95 per cent said it matters that their trip feels personal and unique rather than typical or pre-planned, and 64 per cent intentionally leave portions of their schedule unplanned to explore.

For Gen Z, the stay itself has become the destination. 82 per cent said accommodation is very or extremely important when planning a trip, and 78 per cent spend at least half their total trip time at their accommodation. The features they look for are not a hotel checklist but a "home wishlist"—a balcony or terrace, closeness to local streets and markets, enough space for everyone, and a shared living area to be together. *—ANI*

India and South Korea discuss digital cooperation

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

India and South Korea held talks on Saturday to explore cooperation in digital governance, e-government, public administration, capacity building, and citizen-centric service delivery. The discussions took place during a meeting between South Korea's Minister of Interior Yun Hojung and India's Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh.

Singh said both ministries are finalising a MoU to promote collaboration in administration and government innovation. Included digital transformation, emerging tech like AI, capacity building, citizen participation, and public grievance systems. Singh highlighted India's progress in digital governance, mentioning initiatives like CPGRAMS.

The Korean delegation shared experiences in smart governance and disaster management. Both leaders emphasised strengthening people-to-people contacts and institutional partnerships.

Singh also invited the Koreans to participate in Yoga celebrations. The meeting ended positively, reaffirming their commitment to citizen-based cooperation. *—PTI*

Cunha, Vinicius score in Brazil's 3-0 win over Haiti

PHILADELPHIA, 20 JUNE

Brazil got their FIFA World Cup 2026 campaign up and running in style with a convincing 3-0 victory over Haiti in Philadelphia, moving to the top of Group C and ending the Caribbean nation's hopes of reaching the knockout stage.

After a disappointing 1-1 draw against Morocco in their opening match, Carlo Ancelotti's side arrived under pressure to deliver a statement performance. Haiti, meanwhile, entered the contest encouraged by a spirited display against Scotland despite suffering defeat.

Brazil showed their attacking intent from the outset and thought they had taken an early lead when Raphinha finished from Bruno Guimaraes' clever through ball. However, the celebrations were cut short by an offside flag.

The breakthrough eventually arrived midway through the first half. Vinicius Junior's powerful effort was parried by goalkeeper Johny Placide, but Matheus Cunha reacted quickest to force the loose ball over the line despite desperate attempts from the Haitian defence to clear it.

Cunha doubled Brazil's advantage soon after, capping an impressive display with a clinical finish. The striker raced onto a perfectly weighted pass from Vinicius and blasted his effort into the roof of the net at the near post, leaving Placide with no chance.

Vinicius then added a third before the interval to put the result beyond doubt.

Despite creating fewer chances in the second period, Brazil remained in control and thought they had added a fourth through Endrick, only for the goal to be ruled out for offside.

The victory gives Brazil four points from two matches, level with Morocco but ahead on goal difference, and leaves them well placed to secure a place in the Round of 32. They will face Scotland in their final group match, while Haiti's elimination was confirmed despite their improved second-half display. —*ANI*

NEYMAR EXPECTED TO PLAY FOR BRAZIL POST INJURY

PHILADELPHIA, 20 JUNE

Neymar is expected to return from a right calf injury and play for Brazil in its final World Cup group match, coach Carlo Ancelotti said. Neymar missed Brazil's first two games of the tournament, including Friday's 3-0 win over Haiti.

Ancelotti said Neymar would go through individual training on Saturday, train with the team on Monday and "will be available" for Brazil when it closes Group C play against Scotland on Wednesday in Miami Gardens, Florida.

Neymar is Brazil's career scoring leader with 79 goals in 129 international appearances.

The 34-year-old midfielder has yet to practice in full sessions with the team since reporting to Brazil's squad while nursing the calf injury. —*PTI*

NO BRAZIL TEAM GEAR FOR ROCKY STATUE

PHILADELPHIA, 20 JUNE

Brazil fans who went the distance up the Philadelphia Museum of Art steps to pose with the Rocky statue left the fictional fighter just as they found him. Because there is no taking chances of getting hit by the Rocky curse.

Yes, the Rocky statue, long a symbol of resilience, heart and the unbreakable bond between Rocky and the people of Philadelphia, has taken a few more hits of late. Visiting American sports fans have long learned the hard way that dressing the statue with colourful jerseys, scarfs, hats, anything found in your local Rally House, has only meant that the team would suffer a knockout blow at the home of the local Philly team.

Every Brazilian fan – in Philadelphia to watch their team play Haiti at the World Cup – who stopped for a snapshot or a selfie with the 9-foot-11, 1,300-pound beast left the statue dressed in only his bronze trunks and boots. —*PTI*

YAMAL 'NOT FULLY FIT', UNLIKELY FOR SPAIN'S SECOND GAME

NEW YORK, 20 JUNE

Lamine Yamal is not feeling 100% fit and is not likely to start for Spain in the match against Saudi Arabia on Sunday at the World Cup.

Yamal came into the tournament nursing a left hamstring injury and was only a substitute in the team's opener on Monday — a disappointing 0-0 draw against Cape Verde.

"I'm fine, I feel good, but it's still too soon," Yamal told Spanish network RTVE. "It's unnecessary (to take risks). I'm going through an adaptation process, it's not the time to play a full match yet. But I can play as many minutes as the coach wants."

The 18-year-old Yamal came off the bench in the 71st minute against Cape Verde but was not able to spark La Roja to victory against the nation of about half-million people that was making its debut at soccer's showcase event. —*PTI*

Paraguay's Galarza scores tournament's fastest goal in 64 seconds

Paraguay's Matias Galarza scores their first goal —*ANI*

SANTA CLARA, 20 JUNE

Paraguay midfielder Matias Galarza etched his name into FIFA World Cup history after scoring the fastest goal of the 2026 tournament, finding the net just 64 seconds into his side's crucial Group D clash against Turkiye.

The 24-year-old capitalised on a Turkish turnover deep in their own half before unleashing a powerful low strike from outside the penalty area that beat goalkeeper Ugurcan Cakir and gave Paraguay an early 1-0 lead.

The goal surpassed the previous fastest strike of the tournament, set on the same day earlier by Morocco midfielder Ismael Saibari, who scored after 70 seconds in his side's 1-0 victory over Scotland.

For Paraguay, Galarza's record-breaking effort came at a critical moment.

La Albirroja entered the match under pressure following a heavy 4-1 defeat to the United States in their opening group fixture. The early breakthrough provided a significant boost to Paraguay's hopes of reviving their World Cup campaign and altered the tactical complexion of the contest, forcing Turkiye to chase the game from the outset.

Turkiye, meanwhile, were already facing mounting pressure after a disappointing 2-0 loss to Australia in their tournament opener.

The concession left them staring at the possibility of another damaging result and a bottom spot in Group D. —*ANI*

Almiron is 1st to get a red-carded at World Cup

Paraguay midfielder Miguel Almiron became the first player issued with a red card at the World Cup for covering his mouth, getting sent off during a confrontation late in the first half against Turkey.

The infraction came during first-half stoppage time in the Group D match on Friday night when Almiron and Mert Mulder exchanged words following a foul near midfield. Almiron covered his mouth while saying something to Mulder, who immediately appealed to referee Ivan Barton for punishment.

Barton went to video review and quickly ruled that Almiron would be given a red card and ejected under a new rule put in place for this year's World Cup. —*PTI*

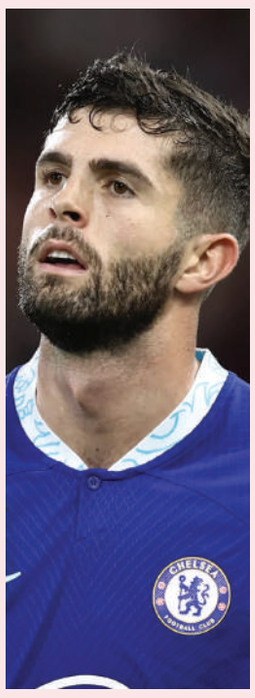
INJURED PULISIC TO MISS MATCH AGAINST AUSTRALIA

SEATTLE, 20 JUNE

US star Christian Pulisic will the World Cup match against Australia because of a calf injury and was replaced in the starting lineup by Ricardo Pepi.

US coach Mauricio Pochettino announced this at an interview with Fox about 90 minutes before the kickoff at Lumen Field in Seattle. Pochettino said Pulisic is in a "much better" spot than he was last Friday, and that he would be available for the Americans' next game against Turkey if he could not play against Australia.

"I hope he can be ready to be selected again and to be part of the team. Now, we need to be focused on our team and the players that are going to play." The move is a setback for a US team that defeated Paraguay 4-1 in its opener on 12 June and with a win would clinch advancement to the round of 32.—*PTI*



NZ edge Ireland by 4 runs, keeps WC hopes alive

SOUTHAMPTON, 20 JUNE

New Zealand kept alive slim hopes of defending the Women's Twenty20 World Cup title by beating Ireland by four runs in a thriller to the last ball. Ten dropped catches cost New Zealand its first two games against the West Indies and Sri Lanka, and it faced elimination with two group games remaining if it didn't beat Ireland, also winless. New Zealand recovered from 10-3 to post 140-6 on a last-ball six by Suzie Bates, the storied allrounder making her first appearance in the tournament. New Zealand pacer Bree Illing bowled out with a sterling 1-18 but Ireland captain Gaby Lewis and Orla Prendergast played around her and Jess Kerrin a partnership of 110 into the 18th over. They put Ireland in sight of an historic first World Cup win after 19 defeats but Prendergast was caught near the boundary on 59. In the 19th over Lewis gave Bates a catch at cover. That left Ireland needing 15 runs in last over. —*PTI*

India beat Afg by 9 wickets, sweep ODI series 3-0

India's Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrates his century with Shreyas Iyer at the final ODI match in Chenna —*PTI*

CHENNAI, 20 JUNE

India completed a clean sweep of the three-match ODI series with a comprehensive nine-wicket win over Afghanistan in the final match, as Yashasvi Jaiswal smashed an unbeaten century and combined with Rohit Sharma for a 170-run opening stand to make the chase a mere formality here on Saturday.

Chasing a modest 219-run target, India raced to victory in just 28.4 overs, losing one wicket. Jaiswal slammed an unbeaten 110 off 86 balls (14 boundaries, 3 sixes), while Rohit scored 79 off 69 deliveries.

However, despite Krishna's destructive spell, Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi stood firm with his maiden ODI century, leading a remarkable recovery after the visitors were reduced to 36 for 4 in the 10th over.

Shahidi, who had endured a quiet series until then, struck 13 boundaries and a six in his 131-ball 102, while Azmatullah Omarzai provided valuable support with a brisk 56-ball 50. —*PTI*

Neeraj finishes 4th at Doha Diamond League

DOHA, 20 JUNE

Forced to delay the start season due to an injury, Indian javelin throw ace Neeraj Chopra finished fourth in the Doha Diamond League here.

Chopra, 28 produced a best of 85.69m in his third attempt, which placed him fourth in his season-opener on Friday.

He was competing here for the first time after finishing eighth in the World Championships. He has been training in Switzerland, after a rehabilitation stint in Turkey.

Rising Sri Lankan star and world leader Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage won the title with a throw of 88.68m, while two-time world champion Andersen Peters of Grenada was second with 86.38. This was the first time Chopra has not finished in top-two in a Diamond League event in the last four years. —*PTI*

PLAN FOR 2028

Task force to be set up for F1's India return: Mandaviya

NEW DELHI, 20 JUNE

Seeking to accelerate the process of reviving Formula One in India, Sports Minister Manuskh Mandaviya on Saturday said a Task Force would be instituted "as soon as possible" to assess the challenges and benefits of hosting major motorsport events here.

Mandaviya told reporters that the move was an outcome of a recent meeting with all stakeholders, including officials from Formula One, Buddh International Circuit owners, the Adani Group, representatives of the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI), and young racers.

"The Ministry will constitute a dedicated four-five member Task Force to undertake a detailed assessment of the motorsports ecosystem in the country and examine the challenges associated with its growth," he said.

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya with Indian racer Atiqa Mir. The 11-year-old is India's leading racer on the world stage —*PTI*

"The Task Force will evaluate the international, economic, tourism, and investment benefits arising from hosting major motorsport events in India. It will also identify key priorities, infrastructure requirements, and operational needs necessary for the sustainable development of the sector and submit its recommendations to the Sports Ministry."

It will have representation from FMSCI, Sports Ministry, state government (Uttar Pradesh as Buddh International Circuit is in Greater Noida), and the facility owners. "The idea is to have a Formula One race in India by 2028." —*PTI*